

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

A Northern California Section of the American Society of Mammalogists was formed at Berkeley, California, on the evening of February 5, 1920. Mr. Tracy I. Storer informs us that the meeting, which was held at the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, was attended by the following: A. K. Fisher, J. Grinnell, A. B. Howell, W. C. Jacobsen, I. M. Johnston, J. E. Law, L. Little, D. D. McLean, J. Mailliard, C. R. Russell, T. I. Storer, H. S. Swarth, and H. G. White. Officers elected for the ensuing year are as follows: President, Joseph Dixon; Vice-President, Joseph Mailliard; Secretary, Tracy I. Storer. Until further notice the Section will meet on the first Thursday of every month at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California. Mr. Storer extends an invitation to all members of the Society who may be visiting California to "drop in" at any of the meetings and will be glad if such members can present papers before the section.

Dr. Walter P. Taylor tells us of the organization at Seattle, Washington, on January 7, 1920, of the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Club, with officers as follows: President, Prof. F. S. Hall, University of Washington; Vice-President, J. Hooper Bowles, Tacoma; Secretary and Treasurer, Stanton Warburton, Jr., University of Washington. Thirteen persons were present at the organization meeting and letters were received from others who wished to become charter members. The State Museum at the University of Washington is the official home of the club and the field of operations includes northern Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska.

The actual date of publication of the February number of the *Journal of Mammalogy* was March 2, 1920. The schedule for printing the *Journal* has now been advanced, so that the date of issue for each number should come early in the regular month of publication, and chances for serious delay will be reduced to a minimum.

It is only natural that many of the members of the Society or readers of the *Journal* should be more interested in North American mammals than in those of any other country; and it is doubtless true that a large proportion of our pages should at present be devoted to papers on Nearctic forms. It comes as something of a surprise however that members should seriously consider and actually advocate limiting the *Journal* very largely if not altogether to accounts of our native species. It is highly proper that certain individuals or institutions should specialize on the fauna of a definite region, on a limited part of such fauna, or, if they wish, on a single family or genus. But for one who does specialize in any of these ways, no matter how intensive his studies, a general knowledge of the group at large would seem to be imperative. A zoologist may confine his real labors, his published results, to a single group or a limited locality but unless his interest and study extend to related forms and regions his work can not be of the highest order. A real interest in the study of mammalogy carries with it an intense desire for information beyond the limits of a county, state, or continent. What of the exact relationships with Old World or Neotropical forms? How about

the extinct species of the same or related groups? How do specialists in other countries, or workers in other fields, handle such and such questions? These are all matters having a vital interest in the work of any specialist, and, if they are ignored, only inferior work can result. It is hard to imagine a student especially interested in any group of mammals or in the fauna of any given region who does not keenly desire to learn all he can of the related forms of the world, living or extinct, or of the technique of other workers who are dealing with them. Such a student is handicapped beyond measure.

The future of the fur-bearing animals looks dark indeed. Virtual extinction of many species is imminent unless prompt and effective means for their protection are devised and enforced. The tremendous popularity of furs of all kinds, the greatly increased number of persons who can or do afford expensive clothing of this kind, and the consequent price on the head of every living fur-bearer, threaten speedily to wipe certain mammals from the face of the earth. It is absolutely certain that many species can withstand the present yearly toll only a short while longer. With raw skunk skins selling in New York City during February up to \$12.50 each wholesale, what chance has the animal for existence as a wild creature?

The offerings at the New York raw fur sale in February included over 1,121,000 domestic skins, and a very great many more from foreign countries. Among those listed were 27,000 red fox, 175,000 opossum, 73,000 raccoon, 32,000 wolf (probably including coyote), 239,000 skunk, 4350 badger, 6200 gray fox, 41,500 mink, 7700 marten, 58,000 civet cat, 68,000 ermine, and 9800 wild cat and lynx. The foreign items included, for example, 234,000 Australian opossum, 325,000 squirrel, and 23,500 kangaroo and wallaby skins. This is only one sale in one city, but newspaper reports state that the receipts totaled \$10,600,000.

The fur-bearing animals are a mighty asset to the country, but unless they are carefully guarded by wise legislation and a favorable public sentiment we will soon be without them. It is doubtful if the "fur farms" can furnish enough skins to keep the particular species raised on them in fashionable demand. The main supply must come from wild-killed animals, and few species can long stand the present killing. Those familiar with conditions in the field know only too well that the time of practical extinction for several valuable species is dangerously near at hand. Vernon Bailey, chief field naturalist of the Biological Survey, once estimated that every living badger on a western ranch was worth \$100 to the land-owner as a destroyer of noxious rodents, and the economic value of the skunk and others of the smaller carnivores is well known. But here are the skins of 4350 of these one-hundred-dollar badgers offered in one sale of raw furs, together with the skins of 239,000 grubworm destroying skunks, which will be manufactured into articles to be used a comparatively short time and discarded. It is a question if many of the mammals suffering this depletion from the demands of fashion are not of more permanent value to the country in other ways, and their certain extermination a serious national loss. —N. H.